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**21) A possible explanation of the supposed word *même* in the Etana epic** — In Tablet 3 of the Etana epic king Etana is carried to heaven twice on the back of an eagle, who repeatedly asks him to look downwards and describe what he sees. During the second flight Etana gives the following description of the sea from a height of 1 mile (I follow the editions of Haul 2000 and Novotny 2001) :

(M Rev. 21) *tam-tu<sub>4</sub> i-tu-ra a-na me-e-ṛMEṛ.E-ma* : « The sea turned into *me-e-ṛMEṛ.E* ! »

This passage, preserved only on one Neo-Assyrian fragment (M), contains the supposed word *me-e-ṛMEṛ.E*, which is attested only here. (M Rev. 24 contains the phrase *ma-a-tu<sub>4</sub>-me-e me-[x]-ma*, « The land is ...[...] ! », but here *-me-e* is most likely an enclitic particle ; cf. GAG §123d). A satisfactory explanation of *me-e-ṛMEṛ.E* has not been found (cf. Haul 2000, p. 230). Most translators assume a hapax *mêmu* representing some body of water. However, it has been overlooked that a similar phrase, with *me-e-ṛMEṛ.E* replaced by *mê(A.MEŠ) palgi(PA<sub>5</sub>)*, occurs in line vii.12' of the Middle-Assyrian fragment VAT 10137 (MA-III in Haul 2000) :

[*tam-tu i<sup>2</sup>-t<sup>2</sup>u<sup>2</sup>-r[a<sup>2</sup> ki]-i mê(A.MEŠ) palgi(PA<sub>5</sub>)-ma* : [The sea be]cam[e<sup>2</sup> li]ke the water of a canal !

ME.E is orthographically very similar to PAP+E = PA<sub>5</sub> = *palgu*, 'canal', since ME and PAP differ only by the orientation of one wedge. This would suggest that the signs transliterated as ṛMEṛ.E should be read as ṛPA<sub>5</sub>, resulting in a translation « The sea turned into the water of a canal ! ». Nevertheless, ṛMEṛ.E does appear to be the correct reading in fragment M, as copied by Kinnier-Wilson (Pl. 24) and confirmed by my own collation. I therefore assume that, somewhere in the chain of transmission leading to fragment M, ṛPA<sub>5</sub> was mistakenly copied as ṛMEṛ.E. If more duplicates of the Standard Babylonian version were to surface they may well have PA<sub>5</sub> instead of ME.E. Other arguments support an original reading *me-e palgi(PA<sub>5</sub>)*, « water of a canal ». First, the only other comparison made by Etana that is well preserved in the Middle-Assyrian version involves *mušarû*, « garden plot ». Since this reappears in the Neo-Assyrian version, the same may be expected for *mê palgi*. Second, a more coherent and sensible sequence of descriptions of the sea is obtained. Etana's next description of the sea during the second flight, made from a height of 3 miles is : *tam-tu<sub>4</sub> i-tu-ra a-na i-ki ša<sub>2</sub> <sup>lu<sub>2</sub></sup>nuka[ri<sup>2</sup>bi<sup>2</sup>](NU-<sup>gi</sup>šKIRI<sub>6</sub><sup>2</sup>)*, « The sea turned into the field of a gar[dener<sup>2</sup>] ! » (M Rev. 27). In both descriptions the sea is now compared with familiar features of the agricultural landscape, and they are ordered from large to small, as expected.

#### Bibliography

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**22) How many tablets did Ludlul Bêl Nêmeqi consist of?\*** — It is generally assumed that the ancient poem known by its incipit *Ludlul Bêl Nêmeqi* and otherwise known as the *Righteous Sufferer* or the *Babylonian Job* must have consisted of four tablets (i.e., four chapters); see, for example, most recently, Lenzi and Annus, *JNES* 70, pp. 181ff. However, a careful reconstruction of the poem, particularly of the texts contained in Tablet III and the last tablet, indicates that this ancient poem might have been significantly longer, probably consisting, in fact, of five tablets, when it was complete. Two arguments speak in favour of this conjecture: 1) the length of the lacunae in Tablet III; and 2) the excerpts found in the ancient commentary on *Ludlul Bêl Nêmeqi* (K 3291=Lambert, *BWL* pls. 15–17) which have not yet been correlated to the main texts.

First, I propose to show how many lines from Tablet III are still missing. Five manuscripts of Tablet III of *Ludlul Bêl Nêmeqi* are known to me. They are:

Si 55 (Lambert, *BWL*, pl. 13, MS q);

BM 54821 (*ibid.*, pl. 74);

BM 55481<sup>1</sup>;

VAT 9954 (*ibid.*, pl. 12, MS P);

VAT 11179 (*ibid.*, 74)

plus an excerpt on a school tablet, BM 68435 (Gesche, *Schulunterricht* p. 558).